



# Enhancing Empowerment for Women through Education: A Study Exploring the Link between Non-formal and Formal Education in Indian Context

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# **Enhancing Empowerment for Women through Education: A Study Exploring the Link between Non-formal and Formal Education in Indian Context**

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## **Abstract (Summary)**

In developing countries, opportunities for education for men and women still have a wide gap leaving a large number of women with very little or no education. This in turn gives very few options to the women and results in life of perpetual poverty for them. To empower women it is vital to understand the obstacles that create this situation. Based on that, solutions could be found and ways could be discovered to combat these circumstances. Reviewing the current situation in India and investigating into what has been done so far to prevent it, would throw some light on the state of affairs there.

Many efforts have been made and actions have been taken to improve the gender equality in India, both government-sponsored and private. Non-Governmental Organizations' (hereafter, NGO) contributions have been significant in that in India. NGOs support for the women to achieve empowerment in the recent years in India, has gained attention, especially on poverty in rural area and illiteracy of women. The studies on them show the grassroots NGOs' focus on the current problems and their initiatives to improve the present situation by addressing specific issues.

This research paper probes into women's empowerment process in India through education. It basically deals with women in West Bengal (henceforth, W. B.), an eastern state of India. It started out with looking for the clues of women's empowerment in Kolkata (henceforth Kol.), the capital of W. B., India. Initially the research began with surveying the students of some skill-based educational courses offered by a well-known Mission based in Kol. Even if the student body was formed entirely by women, this Mission was run by monks. Therefore, the next step led it to another Mission, run entirely by the women and for the women and children. Research work was done particularly at two of its centers and a hospital.

At one point of the survey an impassable gap surfaced. This proved to be a turning point of this research work. It became obvious that to go further with the research, the gap needed to be probed. The underprivileged background of the recipients of the course at

the Mission manifested the incapacity of them to merely approach the Mission, let alone admitting themselves into a highly demanded course there. Therefore, to respond to the gap investigations started. It revealed the existence of an NGO whose educational support was indisputably essential for them to create the pathway for them from their underdeveloped villages to the gleaming capital of the state, from under-funded, under-achieved schools to the top-notch educational institution.

This NGO help mainly young, rural women at the grassroots level with non-formal educational support. They help them with their school work before and/or after school and support them to keep that continuing. They train them to become sincere students at first and good citizens at the end with manners and responsibility. After encountering this particular NGO, the purpose of this study changed to some degree, it became a study to explore the connection between formal and non-formal education. In addition, it strived to detect the impact of that on the process of empowerment for women which have been observed through the course of this research.

The overview narrates the journey of the researcher from the start to the final phase of the research through different stages. It strives to identify the course that leads from illiteracy and ignorance to education and enlightenment. The statement of the research problem states specifically how the field of education was explored in order to detect the clues for empowerment for women and girls. Instead of following one single way of analyzing, this study follows a multi-faced analysis system and deviates from the initially intended case study approach of some Missions and its female students in skill-based education courses. At the end, it finally focuses on the connection between two forms of education: formal and non-formal in empowering women. Here research design and research methods are also described.

The objective of this research is to point to the revision of the present education system and devise suitable programs and methods towards a desirable change. In order to do this, an understanding of the impact of education on girls and women in the grassroots level is essential. One of the fundamental goals of this study, therefore, is to understand in depth how education might affect the lives of the deprived girls and women. This study is limited to girls and women in dire need of education in India. It contains some data of girls and women of similar age groups, family, social and economic background and place of residence. This study strives to demonstrate how education helps to empower girls and young women socially and economically and the role played by

non-formal education to connect them to formal education.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: Who are the recipients of the courses of the Mission or the educational support of the NGO? Why are they taking the courses or receiving the support? How does the courses or the support help these women empower? What category of empowerment that might be? Is there any link between the non-formal study support and the formal school education? In order to address the research questions, multiple sources of evidence have been utilized, such as, questionnaires, interviews, observations, written documents as the main instruments for data collection. The participants were selected for understanding the core content of the research questions, e.g. mostly students and one of the directors of the related NGO.

The researcher reports the findings from the data collected from a variety of surveys, e.g. structured and semi-structured interviews, questionnaires etc. The interviews and the questionnaires were administered at different locations at different times to different people involved. The questionnaires were filled in by the female users and students of the Mission. Several semi-structured and unstructured extensive interviews with the managing trustee of the NGO of this study were conducted as well as with some former students of the NGO and skill-based course of the Mission, who are currently employed at the Mission hospital and are also the First-Generation Learners (FGLs). In the interviews it was maintained that they reflect upon their first-hand experiences of working or studying. The intent was to gain an insight into the process and outcome of the educational programs offered by the Mission and the NGO and the impact of that in the lives of the women who received that. It also used some strategic documents from the case study organizations, such as, the organization booklets, annual reports etc. and also used some scholarly literature. Data gathered from different sources is considered as a major strength for the study as it can use various approaches (Yin, 2014).

The goal of this study is to understand and estimate the effects of the educational programs of the Mission, both formal and non-formal, and the non-formal educational support programs of the NGO on the society. In this case, the study addresses social and economic empowerment of women in the relevant community through education. The foundation of this study owes to a wide body of literature across disciplines, such as, history, political Sciences, social sciences, religious studies, women's studies etc. The researcher tries to examine the feedback from the questionnaires and the interviews and the other sources mentioned above and tries to estimate the impact of education on the

empowerment of the female students as well as tries to expose if there is a link between non-formal and formal education.

This research project is particularly significant in that the researcher tried to establish a much-needed connection between receiving an education and empowerment. It also clarified that the education whether formal or non-formal, has the benefit of empowering women. At the same time, it establishes the link between the necessity of non-formal educational support for the underprivileged girls/women for achieving a formal education and having the desired outcome from it. Again, along the rough course for girls/women in India, particularly in the underprivileged section of the society, voluntary organizations or NGOs' contribution is seen as outstanding in helping women being educated and empowered.

In India women's education and empowerment depend heavily on their family background. It makes it challenging for Indian women to have a satisfactory social status without support from their family and that depends on whether the family actually can extend some support to them. The economic power and social status of the family play a pivotal role in women's empowerment in India. This is particularly true for girls/women in the rural area and at the grassroots level of the society. In order to understand about the growth and development of women, financial background and social position of the family are needed to be studied as they obviously influence education and socio-economic status of girls/women in India.

Moreover, certain cultural phenomena have been observed for being the vital reasons for which the growth and development of women in India have been in jeopardy. A remarkable one is that, in Indian culture women are regarded responsible for the well-being of the entire family. They are supposed to devote all of their time and energy, in other words, their entire life, for that reason (Rajadhakshya & Bhatnagar, 2000), which often steals their opportunities, time and energy of getting an education as a child or as an adult. Again, the parents choose to educate the male child over a female child when and where a choice has to be made, which directly points to the underprivileged rural populace in India. One of the two significant factors exerting influence in girls' and women's education in India is rural-urban differences. The other is age. In rural India, only about 3 percent of adolescent girls and women in the age group 15-19 and 20-24 respectively attend any educational program (Ramachandran, 1998).

It has been said that, “the challenges of conquering poverty, combating climate change and achieving truly sustainable development” all depend on the education level of the country, so it is possible to “transform individual lives, national economies and our world” through quality education (Ban-Ki-Moon, 2015). Therefore, in manifold ways it holds extreme importance for research in the theme of education and empowerment which includes but not limited to, women in India.

This research paper has four main chapters organized in chronological order. The researches were conducted and data was collected from 2016 to 2018. The first one, gives a case study report of empowerment through skill-based education. It details the achievements of female students through skill-based education at a Mission school. The second study explores the field of extra-curricular activities at a Mission center that promoted empowerment for women. It is based on a questionnaire survey done by the participants of the extra-curricular activities. The third one shows how educational achievements lead to empowerment, drawing on research stimulated by the query about the journey of the under-privileged female students from the backward rural areas to an urban, top notch educational institution. It mainly describes the route of their journey from the village to the city with some external educational help offered by an NGO. This is based on a number of interview surveys of the managing trustee of the NGO. The final one in the collection is based on some FGLs’ perception of education as a means for empowerment. It reports the views of the young women on education, community and their expedition from a deprived background to a life of dignity. This is situated on mainly two interview surveys of a group of 4 young employed women who previously as students had connection with both the NGO and the Mission of this research. This one is founded on Life Course Theory (LCT).

From a sense of humility, the researcher started this study to gather knowledge in the field of education in India and explored some of the rural areas of WB and got connected with some socially deprived Indian girls and women. The researcher expected that this paper would illuminate the area of education that gets bypassed often. The well-meaning researcher intended to do the research in-depth and impartially to produce well-reasoned outcome. Nonetheless, the prior connection of the researcher with the area and its people, language and culture in general might have generated biases which might have influenced the process or the outcome of the research. Nevertheless, according to Greenbank (2003), acknowledgement of the presumption makes the research reliable.

This study started with an assumption that having an education had a positive effect on people, particularly on girls and women. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what kind of effects education might have on the recipients of it. It was assumed that through education, people in general and girls and women, in particular, would be empowered. This research considered how education has impacted and empowered girls/women and what category/categories of empowerment that might be. Although it might not be possible to consider all the ways that education might have impacted all of the recipients.

This study examines the process of being empowered through education for the girls and women at the grassroots level in rural India. The persons in this study share their unique concepts and interpretations about education and empowerment which is authentic to them. Because of this personal nature of the experiences, they may not be experienced or shared by other girls and women even in the same area. At the same time, people interviewed or attempted the questionnaire survey are rather small in number. Therefore, this study cannot be generalized; however, the first-hand experiences of the people connected to this study are powerful and meaningful. Their elaborated lived experiences related to education, formal as well as non-formal, and empowerment, have deep impact while implementing plans for education, empowerment and women. Again, although there might be some contribution of knowledge in the relevant fields through this dissertation, the intention here is that to encourage more investigation in the vast area of education and empowerment. At the same time, knowledge as well as understanding of the core topic and related topics is utterly important while pursuing for the desired goal, women's empowerment.

Below, the organization of the paper is given with a short summary of each chapter.

Chapter 1, Introduction, presents the layout of this paper in eight sections: Overview, Statement of the Research Problem, Objectives and Research Questions, Rationale of the Study, Significance of the Topic, Organization of Thesis, Role of the Researcher and Limitations of the Study.

Chapter 2, Literature Review, presents the required examination of theoretical research related to the issues discussed in this study. The body of literature reviewed here introduces, analyses and critiques the existing discourses on various subjects important for this research. First, the research design and the methods used for this study are presented. The literature on various theories that are briefly reviewed here serve as the

foundation of this study, such as, Life Story Interview, Life History Research, Life Course Theory (LCT), and Feminist Theory. It draws from these theories and utilizes insights from them to create its own.

Next, it provides a synthesis of research on education related to women and society and its impact on empowerment. The topics discussed here are critical for this study, such as, education: formal and non-formal, women, empowerment, NGO, and FGL. The contemporary socioeconomic condition of India, the specific history of NGOs in India, the current situation of women and education and FGLs in India have been important for providing the necessary context for this work.

The chapter concludes with an overview of the contribution of this research that re-examines the relationship between formal and non-formal education. The literature review creates the conditions to understand and pursue the goal of this research. All of the aforementioned topics are discussed mainly in Indian context. Other areas of research important for this study are discussed later in the relevant chapters.

In Chapter 3, the full survey result based on a questionnaire is given along with its procedure and analysis. This chapter contains five sections wherein the researcher strives to demonstrate how the educational program provided by a Mission helps to empower young women socially and economically. It synthesizes findings gathered from the data of the questionnaire survey taken by the all-female students of a skill-based education course at the mission. It presents an in-depth discussion of these findings and the implications of the relationship between education and empowerment.

Empowerment is basically the process to gain power. Here empowerment is judged by attainment of education as “empowerment as an outcome, is measurable against anticipated achievement” (Charlier, 2006a, p. 524). The researcher hypothesizes that these programs convey positive changes in the respective communities, thus serving to empower, not only the students, but also their communities.

Chapter 4, details the description of education related extra-curricular activities offered by a mission to its users and the impact of that on the takers of them. It uses a questionnaire survey in order to decide if those activities impact positively on women who are practicing them and increases the sense of empowerment. In five sections in this chapter the researcher strives to interpret how the extra-curricular activities/



programs provided by a Mission help to nourish the young minds and empower the young women who join the programs. It is hypothesized that these programs help the receivers to gain confidence and, in some cases, some financial benefits as well.

In Chapter 5, the NGO of this study has been introduced. It is based on a number of interview surveys with the managing trustee of that NGO. It elaborates the structure and activities of the NGO that offers educational support to educate and empower young under-privileged female students from the backward rural areas. It narrates the course of those women's journey from the village to a top-notch school in the city with the help of the NGO in order to alleviate rural poverty through education. This chapter irradiates the connection between formal and non-formal education.

This chapter, for the sake of clarity, starts with a detailed discussion on NGO in general, then the NGO of this study. In this chapter, divided into five sections, the researcher strives to demonstrate how the educational programs, along with other programs, provided by the NGO help to empower rural, young people, especially, young women, socially and economically. The researcher hypothesizes that these programs empower young women socially and economically through educational aids and convey changes in the respective communities through them.

Chapter 6 reports the views of some young women on education, community and particularly on their expedition from a deprived background to a life of dignity. This is situated on mainly two interview surveys of a group of 4 young employed women who previously had taken the questionnaire survey for this research. They had connection with both the NGO and the Mission of this study, first as students and then as employees at the mission hospital. The insights of these women about education and empowerment have been captured here who are also the FGLs. Specifically, it explores the field of education in order to determine the indicators for empowerment for female FGLs in Indian context.

Detailed research followed the method of life course theory (LCT) for the participants and the empirical findings of this study reveal striking results on empowerment through education, the quality, its level and type. The outcome contributes to the practices of everyday life of FGLs, also offers insights into the situation of underachieving families in rural India and better interpretations of FGLs' background. Therefore, it may generate better strategies to deal with the situation, for the NGOs and local and national

governments to create policies for educational fields and stimulate the lives of the FGLs and the society as a whole.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the whole study. The conclusion is divided into three parts, discussion of findings, limitations of the study and implications for further research. The results discussed in previous chapters are re-examined and evaluated here. The discussion part reveals the connection between education and women's empowerment and the relationship between formal and non-formal education. This chapter also accommodates a discussion of the implications of the findings based on which future research and practice can be decided, which is the eventual aspiration of this study.

In this paper, against the backdrop of education, empowerment of women, the main theme of this study has been discussed. Empowerment of women in India is seen as being in line with receiving education, both formal and non-formal. The findings of this research demonstrate the relationship between empowerment and education, although the outcome often depends upon many other factors as for the level and type of empowerment.

The research work done in this paper founded on the works previously done by the scholars. It did not contradict with previous researches on empowerment and education. Furthermore, this dissertation makes a specific contribution to the existing body of knowledge in which its empirical findings reveal the impact of education on women's empowerment. Specifically, it tries to illuminate the way between formal and non-formal education. This study is particularly noteworthy in its striking revelation of the relationship between formal and non-formal education. The results cannot be generalized to a broader population because of its small sample size.

Limitation of space prevents broad discussion of insights derived from this research. Nevertheless, the basic ones are summarized here: women can be empowered through education, informal education can help in gaining empowerment, and the type of empowerment varies depending on the types of education/activities. This study details some significant pieces of information which could be outlined as follows:

1. The grassroots NGO of this study helped in the process of acquiring formal education
2. This reveals an underlying connection between non-formal and formal education
3. Many complex issues remain between the non-formal and formal education

Broad survey on educational needs in the grassroots level based on more ground work and evidence is necessary for better policy design and effective implementation of those policies. Yet, this study might still be useful as a vehicle to influence and increase awareness of women's empowerment connected to education.

Key words: Women, India, Education, Empowerment, Mission, NGO, FGL, LCT

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